

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING  
OF THE  
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Eighty-Second Session  
May 31, 2023**

The Committee on Natural Resources was called to order by Chair Lesley E. Cohen at 4:04 p.m. on Wednesday, May 31, 2023, in Room 3143 of the Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada. The meeting was videoconferenced to Room 4401 of the Grant Sawyer State Office Building, 555 East Washington Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada, and to Room 130, Greenhaw Technical Arts Building, Great Basin College, 1500 College Parkway, Elko, Nevada. Copies of the minutes, including the Agenda [[Exhibit A](#)], the Attendance Roster [[Exhibit B](#)], and other substantive exhibits, are available and on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau and on the Nevada Legislature's website at [www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/82nd2023](http://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/82nd2023).

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Assemblywoman Lesley E. Cohen, Chair  
Assemblywoman Natha C. Anderson, Vice Chair  
Assemblywoman Shannon Bilbray-Axelrod  
Assemblywoman Tracy Brown-May  
Assemblywoman Venicia Considine  
Assemblyman Rich DeLong  
Assemblyman Bert Gurr  
Assemblywoman Alexis Hansen  
Assemblywoman Selena La Rue Hatch  
Assemblyman Howard Watts

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Assemblywoman Bea Duran (excused)  
Assemblyman Toby Yurek (excused)

**GUEST LEGISLATORS PRESENT:**

None



**STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Becky Peratt, Committee Policy Analyst  
Erin Sturdivant, Committee Legal Counsel  
Connie Barlow, Committee Manager  
Nancy Davis, Committee Secretary  
Cheryl Williams, Committee Assistant

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Rebecca Goff, Nevada State Director, Humane Society of the United States  
Christi Cabrera-Georgeson, Deputy Director, Nevada Conservation League  
Be-Be Adams, representing Friends of Nevada Wildlife  
Tobi Tyler, Member, Legislative Committee, Toiyabe Chapter, Sierra Club  
Fred Voltz, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada

**Chair Cohen:**

[Roll was called. Rules and protocol of the Committee were reviewed.] We have one bill today. I will open the hearing on Senate Bill 88. With that, I will invite Assemblyman Watts to provide his presentation.

**Senate Bill 88: Requires the Joint Interim Committee on Natural Resources to conduct an interim study of certain state agencies. (BDR S-345)**

**Assemblyman Howard Watts, Assembly District No. 15:**

It is my pleasure to present Senate Bill 88 for your consideration. This was yet another recommendation from the Joint Interim Standing Committee on Natural Resources. It would require the next joint interim committee to conduct a study of agencies that regulate natural resources. Without reading the content of the bill, it is fairly short and clear. This would require that as part of the agenda for the next interim, the Joint Natural Resources Committee would dedicate time to look at the Board of Wildlife Commissioners, Commission on Mineral Resources, entities within the State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), and the State Environmental Commission. It does not direct or require any particular outcome.

There have been multiple proposals over many sessions, including this one, to look at the makeup of various boards and to look at the mission of some of these agencies. We have had conversations in the context of one particular proposal. Some have been successful; many have not. Often that leads to kind of a divide of folks who support and are trying to make their case for that or oppose a particular proposal and make their case for that. We have the sunset subcommittee that looks at various boards and commissions, but this is more about checking that these entities are meeting and fulfilling their roles as it is laid out in statute.

The goal of this is to bring in, for example, the National Conference of State Legislatures to look at some of the models that exist in other places so we have information available to us and to see if there are any trends recently in changes that have been made or proposed. Also, to allow all different stakeholders to come up and have some time on the agenda to talk about what they think would improve things and what voices might be missing; and to have that back and forth with legislators outside of the 120 days of the session and outside the context of any particular proposal. Perhaps there will be some things folks can talk about, work on, and find some consensus to bring forward something that can be considered in a future Legislature, and make improvements for these entities, and perhaps avoid some of the conflict that has popped up on these issues in the past. That is the purpose behind the bill. With that, I am glad to answer any questions that members of the Committee have.

**Assemblywoman Brown-May:**

The bill language says the committee shall examine without limitation. I want to make sure that all of the appropriate entities are included in the study and to confirm on the record that is the intention. If there is a board or commission that oversees something relative to wildlife, we do not want to leave them out inadvertently.

**Assemblyman Watts:**

That is correct. I did not want to list every single entity. There has been a lot of conversations about the Board of Wildlife Commissioners. Not to say there has to be something, but it has been a frequent theme of conversation. I wanted to make sure that it was clear it should be part of the conversation. Regarding the Commission on Mineral Resources and the structure of mining, I brought forward a bill related to this last session. I think through that process, there were some interesting ideas that came up and some interest on exploring those further, but ultimately there was disagreement on that policy and there has not really been additional conversation since then. Both of these are boards with appointments from the Governor. The State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, as we have seen, regulates water rights and many other things, and adopts regulations without having that kind of board structure. That does not mean that looking at their mission and the way they go about that, and their overall purview should be totally off the table. Again, some of these conversations started coming up during the last interim and instead of recommending specific changes in any of these areas based on some of the individual concerns that were raised, the proposal was let us kick this into the next interim and give it the time and kind of the holistic scope that I think it deserves. Something may come out of it, something may not, but I think it is a conversation worth having.

**Chair Cohen:**

Following up on that question, were there any other boards, commissions, or departments that you thought of specifically adding and there was a decision made not to?

**Howard Watts:**

No, nothing was explicitly excluded. I did not want to do a laundry list. There are many other entities out there. For example, I will mention one: The State Board of Agriculture is not on here because we considered and passed legislation to change the makeup of the Board

of Agriculture last session. That was an instance where there was definitely some back and forth, but ultimately there was a successful effort to say the overall scope and activities of the Department of Agriculture has changed. Some of those sectors were not represented on the Board. There was an effort to make sure those different sectors had a seat at the table. I did not include that Board because we just made those changes. Without limitation allows ideas to come up. Typically, in the first meeting of the interim, members of the joint committees bring forward ideas of things they would like to look into. I think that is one of the things that could generate ideas for what ends up on the agenda. I also think there is a lot of encouragement for members of the public and stakeholders to provide ideas of things for the interim committees to consider. That would be another way to generate ideas of which agencies to look at and who to reach out to for ideas and feedback.

**Assemblywoman Hansen:**

You touched on the genesis of the bill, but when we think about the makeup issues, maybe with the Board of Wildlife Commissioners, or you mentioned the makeup of the Commission on Mineral Resources. Can you give us some real-life reasons or maybe situations you have seen that would lead us to think we need to study it. Has there been some concern that the makeup is not balanced? If you could give us some particulars.

**Assemblyman Watts:**

So there has been significant debate with the Board of Wildlife Commissioners in general; sportsmen make up the majority of that body. There has been a lot of debate about that, and there have been proposals brought forward in the past to change that. On the flip side, there have been multiple pieces of legislation brought forward to add an additional position that would be a sportsman who is specifically a guide brought forward by the guide community. While I may personally have opinions, this is not about taking a position one way or another, but instead of arguing the pros and cons of a particular idea, let us step back and look at what other boards in other states' membership look like.

Another thing that has been a frequent topic of conversation, particularly throughout our tenure in the Legislature, has been the issue of representation of Native Americans and Indigenous communities. There have been quite a few policies to try and add positions for Native Americans, tribal members, or tribal governments onto some of these bodies. Instead of having that just thrown out there, I think this could be a forum where issues like that could be brought forward and considered. That is one idea.

Speaking to mineral resources, one area that gets brought up—and I do tend to agree with—is that there is quite a bit of regulation on the mining industry and there are quite a few entities. There is the Commission on Mineral Resources and the Division of Minerals; the State Environmental Commission also plays a role, as does the Mining Oversight and Accountability Commission. That does not even get into taxation and safety and some of the other aspects. I tried to bring forward something that might consolidate that a little bit which ultimately did not move forward. Historically, there have been concerns about or critiques of

the commission's makeup, which is almost all various industry members, I think there is one member of the general public. At times, the general public member has been retired from the industry.

One of the big picture issues is you are trying to attract a diversity of opinions and people to participate in these things, but it generally brings in just the people who are most interested. Sometimes the general public members fit into one of the other categories laid out in statute. Without saying that is exactly right or wrong, if the goal of having those positions is to diversify the thoughts on that board, that might not quite achieve the goal. Those are some of the things that have come up and been discussed in the past that led to this being brought forward.

**Assemblywoman Anderson:**

Will there also be any sort of discussion around the federal partnerships? I think we all know what a huge part the federal legislation and other entities and departments have to do with our natural resources.

**Assemblyman Watts:**

That is not contemplated in this. To be completely clear, this would ensure that this is part of the agenda. Of course, this and the issue you brought up and other issues can all be part of the agenda. I thought it was important to make sure that these issues were part of the agenda for the next interim, given all the bills and all the conversations that have happened in this area, even just in the time that I have been in the Legislature and outside of that as well. I think issues with federal agencies are definitely going to be discussed, but as far as the makeup and structure, since we do not have the ability to change those, it was not really contemplated being part of this particular legislation.

**Assemblyman DeLong:**

I am trying to wrap my brain around this a little bit. It sounds like the intent is to look at what has been the legislative scope and breadth of the mandate for various boards and agencies rather than looking at how each of them are functioning. Am I interpreting what you are saying correctly?

**Assemblyman Watts:**

It is kind of both. There have been conversations about these things as well in terms of the statutory mission or scope of certain entities, where we have these appointed bodies, and the makeup of those as well. A fair answer is it is a bit of both.

**Assemblyman DeLong:**

If it passes, it will basically provide recommendations to the Legislature on changing the scope of the regulatory mandate. That really needs to be considered separately from how programs are being implemented. I would want to make sure that this interim study fully considers the need for those to be looked at separately.

**Assemblyman Watts:**

I would agree with that. Ultimately, we never have any control over what future bodies do, I think that is important. I would agree with that, and it is important to get that on the record in this hearing. Within this, there are different sets of issues, and any proposals should look at them one at a time and there should not be a combining of multiple things in one proposal.

**Assemblywoman Hansen:**

I am thinking about the load that the Joint Interim Standing Committee on Natural Resources would have because the study itself would take place within that. It is not going to be a separate group, right? I am thinking this is quite a load. We did not always meet every month in the interim and I was fine with that. Now we are going to also have public lands within that. This seems like a lot to look at in an interim. I am curious why you do not bring it in bill form. I think you mentioned you brought a bill that did not come forward, one to address the makeup of the Board of Wildlife Commissioners. Am I not remembering correctly?

**Assemblyman Watts:**

I have never brought a bill forward related to the makeup of the Wildlife Commission; I did have a lot of conversations about it. The only bill I know that came forward this session was actually on the Senate side, related to the representation of guides on that board. To your point, just being fully honest, yes, this is something that could be done no matter what.

To provide a little bit of additional context, last session, as part of the water conservation legislation that we moved forward, it tasked the interim committee to take up a study of water conservation. We held one meeting of the Subcommittee on Public Lands in Boulder City, specifically focused on that issue, but it was also kind of a theme, as we traveled to other areas, held additional meetings, worked with peoples' schedules, and tried to make sure that was a substantial part of the agenda. That is what is envisioned with this. It is not saying that anything needs to be displaced.

To your point about workloads, there is kind of a scoping once the chair is selected to figure out what the workload is, including what the issues are and how many meetings might be needed. Natural Resources did not meet every month, but we did pretty much meet every month between Natural Resources and Public Lands. With the consolidation, I expect that the same number of meetings between both the committee and subcommittee will probably be there. I think we had eight total meetings during the interim. This would be spread out across those eight meetings. If it seemed like taking this on would require a little bit extra, the leadership of that interim committee could request the setting up of the budget and the allocation for that from the Legislative Commission, to include an extra meeting.

**Chair Cohen:**

Seeing no other questions, I will move on to support in Carson City.

**Rebecca Goff, Nevada State Director, Humane Society of the United States:**

On behalf of our Nevada members, we support S.B. 88. Such an examination is critically needed at this time when state wildlife governance faces increasing calls to adapt to changing public values and attitudes towards wildlife. Recent landmark research from the Colorado State University called the "America's Wildlife Values" project found that animal welfare has become an increasingly important concern for the general public nationwide. The research found that twice as many Nevadans hold mutualist views in which they believe that humans should humanely coexist with wildlife, than those who hold a more traditional view that wildlife should be used and managed for human benefit. More than 66 percent of Nevada residents surveyed in that study agreed that our state should strive for environmental protection over economic growth.

A study called the "Nature of Americans Report" found that Americans expressed broad interest in nature, believing that connecting with nature is important and wanting to conserve wildlife species and their habitats. Research also finds a significant improvement in public attitudes in recent decades towards historically feared and misunderstood species like coyotes and wolves, and that such a change may be indicative of growing concern for the welfare of animals, both wild and domestic. Only 2.9 percent of Nevadans were paid hunting license holders in 2021, yet the vast majority of Nevadans who do not hunt or trap continue to have little to no say in the decisions about the wildlife that is held in trust for them. We therefore ask this Committee to approve S.B. 88 to examine the composition, mission, and scope of state agencies that regulate our precious natural resources that belong to all Nevadans.

**Christi Cabrera-Georgeson, Deputy Director, Nevada Conservation League:**

We are here in support of S.B. 88. These agencies are critical to managing and protecting our natural resources, and it is important that they reflect the values and demographics of the state today. We urge the Committee's support.

**Be-Be Adams, representing Friends of Nevada Wildlife:**

I am just going to say ditto, we support this, and we hope you will vote it through.

**Chair Cohen:**

Seeing no one else in Carson City, is there anyone in support in Elko or Las Vegas? Seeing no one, is there anyone on the phone?

**Tobi Tyler, Member, Legislative Committee, Toiyabe Chapter, Sierra Club:**

On behalf of the Sierra Club and our more than 30,000 members and supporters statewide, I am speaking in support of S.B. 88, which would require the Joint Interim Standing Committee on Natural Resources to conduct an interim study of certain state agencies. The study would include examining the composition, mission, and scope of the Board of Wildlife Commissioners, the Commission of Mineral Resources, the State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the State Environmental Commission and report their findings and recommendations for any legislation to the 83rd Session of the Nevada Legislature. We urge you to support S.B. 88 because it is time to take a more detailed, extensive, and holistic look at these agencies in terms of how we manage natural resources,

protect our limited water supplies, and ensure that we are not putting extractive money interests over protecting our environment for all Nevadans. A study would allow for a more thorough examination of these agencies and allow various interest groups to meet and discuss other states' trends and regulatory structures. For these reasons, we urge you to support S.B. 88.

**Fred Voltz, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada:**

I would like to speak in strong support of S.B. 88. I do believe we need to add the Department of Wildlife to the list of four agencies that would be looked at by the interim committee. So far, we have taken a very piecemeal approach to any modifications and there really is a need for a complete look at how all of these individual operations interact with one another and how they impact the state. For example, the State Wildlife Commission has gone everywhere from 3 members to 17 elected members over time. That does not make a whole lot of sense. The sunset subcommittee deals with departments one at a time. We need a holistic approach to looking at all natural resource issues. This interim study would do that. Finally, regardless of somebody's individual politics, good government means that a periodic review of state agencies is a good operating strategy and a good management strategy.

**Chair Cohen:**

With that, I will move to opposition. Is there anyone in Carson City, Las Vegas, or Elko in opposition? Seeing no one, is there anyone on the phone? Hearing no one, is there anyone in neutral in Carson City, Las Vegas, or Elko? Hearing no one, would the sponsor like to make closing remarks? Assemblyman Watts is waving us off. I will close the hearing on S.B. 88 and open public comment. Is there anyone in Carson City, Las Vegas, or Elko wishing to provide public comment? Seeing no one, is there anyone on the phone? [There was no one.] Committee, I believe there may be at least one more bill coming over from the Senate, but we will see. With that, we are adjourned [at 4:34 p.m.].

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

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Nancy Davis  
Committee Secretary

APPROVED BY:

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Assemblywoman Lesley E. Cohen, Chair

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_



**EXHIBITS**

[Exhibit A](#) is the Agenda.

[Exhibit B](#) is the Attendance Roster.